Discursive Worldview of a Glossy Magazine: Technique of Visualization

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Abstract

In a modern glossy magazine the visual code carries the major part of the message, whereas the text serves the purpose of illustration, which is reflected in the worldview of the reader. There is a system of established mechanisms of how visual information is encoded in the discourse of the magazine. Communication success largely depends on whether the reader identifies himself with the given image. An integrative approach to discourse analysis allows to reveal the mechanisms of visual information encoding. These mechanisms form a special ideology of discourse.

Keywords: technique of visualization; discursive worldview; glossy magazine; ideology of discourse

1. Introduction

In a modern glossy magazine “mediatized reality” (Adzhimaz, Kozhemyakin, 2011) becomes a reality thanks to new types of visual communication. Up to 70 % of all the information in a glossy magazine is taken by visual content. The discourse of a modern glossy magazine is primarily visual and textual space in which various semiotic means are used. Visual signs constituting the communicative space of a magazine become a means of evaluation and an act of influence on the recipient of the information.

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In contemporary communication theory a considerable study is being given to the types of interaction between the author and the addressee. Visual interaction between communicators is the object of study of the theory of art which views visual images as a model of reconstructing the worldview and world perception of a person (Kuzmina, 2012).

Contemporary studies in the field of the theory of art have established that the perception of an image undergoes transformations over time under the influence of a dominating world view at a particular period of time (S.M. Daniel, P.E. Rodkin, A.A. Kurbanovsky, A.A. Gornykh, A.R. Usmanova, M.G. Chistyakova and others).

The audience of contemporary mass media is immersed in the space of visual images, objects and pictures where visual signs become one of the main means of transmission of information, perception of the world, and communication with other people.

According to A. Usmanova, a visual text (advertisement, films, photographs) is not an illustration, an immediate and “passive” reflection of reality, it is rather “a complex historical text that has its own version or view of one or another era, not necessarily agreeing with a point of view stated in other (including official ones) sources (Usmanova, 2004). In this case a visual text can be considered as an interpretation, not an illustration. Therefore, along with a text there is a parallel information field in the communicative space of the magazine – a visual text.

The reader is able to interpret visual signs only if in these signs he sees “a sufficient and necessary image of objects which substitutes actions, situations, reality for the reader” (Adzhimaz, Kozhemyakin, 2011). In this case, it is not what the visual sign communicates, that the reader adopts, but the visual sign itself becomes the only possible reality.

2. Material

The object of our attention is a modern glossy magazine as a new type of media. The hypothesis preceding the research suggested that Thus, the objective of the research is to analyze the components of the mechanism of visual information encoding.

The materials for the study were Russian glossy magazines: “Zdorovie” (Health), “Yoga”, “Vokrug Sveta” (Around the World), “Dorogoedovolstvie” (Costly Pleasure), “Serebryanykofe” (Silver coffee) as of from January 2012 to January 2014. The total number of pages is more than 5000.

3. Method

In order to study the problem an integrative methodology of discourse analysis was used, which included various methods to obtain results at a specific phase of investigation. To identify linguistic aspects of the texts I used methods of linguistic analysis (techniques of structural analysis, techniques of philological analysis of the text structure, techniques of linguostylistic discourse analysis). Since the research goes beyond the boundaries of linguistics, it was necessary to turn to sociolinguistic methods – linguistic data were correlated with the determining extratextual factors. I also used linguocognitive method to describe the axiological aspect of the discursive worldview. Semiotic analysis of the text was used in order to analyze the visual codes in the discursive worldview represented in modern glossy magazines.

4. Discussion

In recent years there have been a number of studies the object of which is the worldview represented in contemporary Russian mass media (M.N. Volodina, V.Z. Demjankov, Z.I. Rezanova, L.I. Ermolenkina, E.A. Kostyashina and others).

Worldview is not, then, a mirror reflection of reality, but one of a possible, “prejudiced” sociocultural and historical models of the world based on an interpretation of the reality by a single or a collective author (Volodina, 2008).
4.1. Technique of visualization as an organization factor of discursive space

In a modern glossy magazine, the visual code becomes one of the basic mechanisms in the formation of the ideology of discourse. Illustrations become the signs of mythological reality. The attributes of this reality are goods and services. A paradigm of values is constructed in the glossy magazine. The paradigm guides the reader, fills his “consumer basket”: the magazine gives the reader the information on how to dress, what to eat, what is in fashion, and other. Visual signs (people, cars, clothes, food, places) are perceived as a part of one’s own image. They are a part of the Ideal Self – of somebody I would like to be, but haven’t become so far (Kovrizhenko, 2004).

The text, then, is subject to the visual image, there appear gaps in the text (Fuko, 1996), and they allow one to draw inferences. The gaps are not directly indicated in the text, but such semantic gaps make the addressee interpret the information in a desired ideological direction. This technique is often realized through the use of illustrations which are not connected with the subject of a message. A visual code of this kind is loaded with a powerful conceptual meaning, but since it is not commented verbally, it becomes a point at which the addressee’s mind is tuned to perceiving the information in a certain way. “Ultimately, the discourse presents something it doesn’t talk about and it is this kind of silence that becomes a gap which, from within, undermines everything that is said” (Fuko, 1996). For instance, an article on healthy eating habits is illustrated by a photograph of a smiling elderly lady. In order to make it possible for a reader to come into the field of a new discourse, it is necessary to help him have a good understanding of a problem. In the above mentioned article it is the problem of ageing. The magazine models the behavior of the reader, who is afraid of getting old. It offers the reader various goods and services which help him to keep looking young or even younger.

An advertised image in the glossy magazine seeks to be like the consumer. Communication success largely depends on whether the reader identifies himself with the given image. It is often through initiation that a new reader comes into the field of the magazine discourse. In order to become an insider, a reader should learn to perfectly read the codes. The text begins to play a secondary role, giving way to the picture. The magazine, for its part, creates discourse masks that determine role models. The role models look as life-like as possible: this is what the text works for.

In order to construct a pseudo-reality they often turn to text techniques: ambiguity (a picture doesn’t illustrate a text, but leads the narrative in another direction), fragmentation (several thematically unconnected illustrations are attached to one article), collage (several pictures overlap each other). Such techniques create an impression of dynamic images (for example, before-and-after transformation images, sequence pictures showing how make up is changing the appearance of a person and suchlike). In this case, the chronotope of the text varies. The picture illustrating the text usually captures either the process or the result. In a glossy magazine it is a set of pictures that defines the narrative thread, whereas the text only serves to enhance, comment the narrative developing from series of pictures.

Thus, the visual code of the magazine does not reflect the situation described, but models an artificial communicative space. Reality is substituted with signs of reality, glossy pictures serving as such signs. A modern glossy magazine does not have a uniform line as to the presentation of information, a common ideology or system of values. Discourse of the magazine forms modern clip culture which often overlaps with the discourse of television and Internet, including elements of reality-shows, internet blogs, forums, cookery programs. It makes the addressee interpret the text in the way the author intended. Therefore, discourse interaction works mainly for propaganda of goods and services, advertisement information making up more than half the printed material.

Another peculiarity of the modern glossy magazine is decentralization – there’s no difference between what’s main or secondary, anything is worth paying attention to, therefore it should be reflected in the text. Media discourse creates hyperreality which is full of various images living a life of their own. The addressee is more likely to believe what he sees on magazine pages than what he sees in real life. That is why, in modern society, a glossy magazine is becoming an encyclopedia of glamorous life, offering readers-viewers the very set of values that will help them take a rightful place in society.

A magazine ensures diversity and change of impressions by means of using a vast number of illustrations, which makes it different from Soviet magazines. The abundance of visual expression and imagery explains exceptional popularity of glossy magazines in post-Soviet Russia. In spite of its high cost (an average glossy magazine costs approximately as much as a book) this kind of magazine is one of the most popular on the market. When most of the newspapers go online losing their market share, the interest in online versions of magazines in Russia is rather low.
A glossy magazine is not only about looking through it, people want to hold it in their hands, have it in their homes, and at work. Therefore, it becomes an integral part of a modern person’s life. Magazines do not merely brighten lives, they also promote feelings and emotions. They add some features of elitism and prestige to ordinary things: “We love to show that we are not “like all the others”. We like going out to pompous events and sensational first nights. We aspire to have the best and the most expensive. Because we like feeling luxuries, looking at luxury, surround ourselves with attributes of luxury” (Serebryanyakofe (Silver coffee), 2012). The visual code gives us the idea of what is the ideal we need to strive for; the text is built over this image. Thus, magazines themselves shape and produce fashion for certain types of events (Demjankov, 2008). On the one hand, the glossy magazine influences the life of society, on the other hand, it is a reflection of the latter.

4.2. Technique of visualization as a mechanism of modeling discursive worldview

The key strategy of the new glossy magazine is self-identification achieved through associating oneself with glossy images. A significant role, in this case, belongs to the technique of erotization – the reader is gradually seduced by an image and then changes his views on life. The process of changing the addressee’s discourse worldview is not simple and not exact (Klushina, 2011). Whether the attempt to influence the reader’s worldview, and consequently, the promotion of goods and services, is successful depends on how convincing argumentation (reasons, examples, statistics) is, although, on their own, these means cannot ensure success. Very often, it is the visual code that is capable of breaking the “critical barrier” built by the addressee. The pictures in a glossy magazine have evaluating implications, they impose a certain attitude toward things that are described. Any kind of visualization of information reinforces confidence in it, which, surely, enhances the likelihood of success. A text can be good or bad, clear and not clear, simple or complex, but there is only one way in which an image is perceived: I am of the same kind (I have the same interests, problems and so on), that is why I need to eat this kind of food, wear this kind of clothes and other. In this case it is the image that has the greatest manipulative effect. An image is perceived as a whole while a text can be fragmentary, extended, it can require a detailed decoding and analytical review. When one identifies himself with characters of glossy editions it allows him to perceive the behavioral pattern presented in a magazine as a part of his own decision. A magazine does offer the reader a number of options as to behavior but it imposes the alternative itself.

Modern media discourse forms its own system of mythologems which are built in a glossy magazine with the help of the visual code. The ideology of discourse reflects the mindset and guidelines of the society at a stage of its development. In the glossy magazine, a conceptual mythologem “a vision of the future” is actualized through the image of the Ideal Self, whom every consumer of a magazine dreams of becoming. To a big extent, the image reflects self-identification of a people. For example, in the reader’s mind the images of ideal men and women are integral with the ideas of health, beauty, sport, individuality, European style, luxury. It is through the visualization of the image that the mythologem acquires discourse interpretation.

The myths that are communicated by a glossy magazine form the stereotypes of social behavior. By means of the visual code the addressee’s attention is focused on one or two basic features of a hero of the time. The features are repeatedly reproduced, communicated, whereby they acquire the quality of a value and become a part of a “consumer basket” of a modern reader. The myths model our understanding of what a modern person should look like, of what lifestyle a person should have. Discourse ideology is translated from the pages of magazines: a character looks this way because he eats a certain type of food, attends a gym, a yoga studio, wears clothes of certain brands. In this case, the image of the character of media discourse determines the whole value hierarchy of the modern society. If religion, arts, morals were the values of the past, cover images are the values of the present.

As to the text of mass media, they form and change the mental world model in the addressee’s mind, i.e. they carry manipulative function. At the present time, the addressee is not a single person but a whole social group, the members of which have similar socio cultural characteristics (Klushina, 2011). The world model presented and communicated in a magazine determines behavior of these groups in many respects.

Each page of a magazine is one whole communicative message, all elements of which influence the worldview of the addressee. The cut-up technique is growing more important in a glossy magazine, which points at the fact that the text has got a non-static character (text, as interpreted classically) and that the discourse of a magazine, the Internet-discourse, and television discourse have a point of convergence. For instance, there are many traditional
television genres: reality show, cookery show, in which visual imagery is a sequence of shots with comments. There are a number of advantages for classical television genres to be used in a magazine format. Discourse chronotope can be prolonged or shortened depending on the author’s purpose and the addressee’s need. While reading a magazine cookery show, the addressee can always go back to the shot he wants to look at, study a picture or read a comment for a few times. A television show eliminates such possibility; having missed a piece of a show, a viewer cannot restore the sequence of actions without some extra effort. At the same time, a recipe was originally a written genre, its television version being a derivative. However, the genre of a recipe is taken into the glossy magazine in its television form.

Another aspect of visualization as a mechanism of forming the worldview of the reader is forming and anchoring the identity in the image presented in a magazine. In the process of coming into a new discursive space, a reader identifies an image as “mine” or “not mine” and adjusts his own perception of the world according to what kind of evaluation the image receives.

It is through the visual code that the reader gets the understanding about the attributes of someone’s belonging to a certain social or cultural group. If something is pictured in a certain way, the reader accepts the stereotype of perception, which is realized in behavioral situations (Bourdieu, 1990). Such “typical images” and “socially approved images” (Adzhimaz, Kozhemyakin, 2011) are different in Russia-wide and regional glossy editions.

Representation of visual images in glossy magazines performs one important social function – identification of readers and personages. A reader strives to come as close as possible to the discourse personality and to become a rightful member of the discourse.

The audience of the glossy magazine sees a mirror reflection of reality in what is pictured. The mirror reflection of reality does not require verifying its accuracy and credibility. To a large extent, this “mirror reflection” is determined by one’s world view and the habit to interpret the world in a certain way, because most of the time the visual code offers the reader something he is used to seeing or would like to see.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of what has been said above is that the modern glossy magazine suffers all sorts of transformations, and is definitely becoming a new type of media for a specific target audience. Not only does it fill the reader’s leisure time, but also shapes a behavior program, a system of values, stereotypes that are meaningful in society at a certain period of time. On the one hand, the glossy magazine reflects the processes taking place in society, and on the other hand, it creates fashion for certain types of events. The visual content, which is a peculiar feature of the discourse of glossy magazines, has a great influence on the worldview of modern readers. That is why, in a glossy magazine, it is not the visual code that illustrates the text, but the text is a means of interpretation of the visual code, which proves the hypothesis stated above.

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